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If you want to become whole,
Let yourself be partial.
If you want to become straight,
Let yourself be crooked.
If you want to become full,
Let yourself be empty.
If you want to be reborn,
Let yourself die.
If you want to be given everything,
Give everything up.

-- The Tao Te Ching

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon
James Schamus
First Draft, Revised
25 March 1999

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Cast of Characters:

CHIEF WONG	Beijing's new Chief Magistrate. Well-respected and honorable, Wong has recently been promoted to the top post in the capital after years serving in the violent Western territories.
TE	An elder Beijing nobleman, he welcomes Master Wong to the capital and joins forces with him against the criminal element.
YUI	One of the finest martial artists in the empire, Yui (late 20s / early 30s) has recently taken over her father's security business. She is a woman who combines rare beauty with a strong moral code.
LI MU BAI	The greatest swordsman and warrior in all of China. Li Mu Bai (30s) was exiled from Beijing for several years on trumped-up charges, and has only recently been cleared through the efforts of Chief Wong and Te.
MAY WONG	The daughter of Chief Wong, May (20) feels restricted by the rigid codes of Chinese society. Stunningly beautiful, she has been raised to obediently follow her parents' wishes into an arranged marriage, but May also has a secret side, which she tries desperately to conceal.
MRS. WONG	May's mother gives new meaning to the word 'chatterbox'. She has little idea of what her daughter is really up to.
GOU	May's intended groom. Gou (20s) comes from a very powerful family.
HAAN	A member of Sir Te's security detail, Haan (30s) has an endearing habit of biting off more than he can chew.
TSAI	A gifted street juggler with a hidden past. Tsai (40s) is burly and self-possessed. Nothing goes beyond his notice.
SUE	Tsai's daughter and a talented juggler in her own right. Pretty and lithe, Sue (20s), takes an instant liking to Haan's awkward charms.
JADE FOX	A masked and vicious bandit who has eluded the authorities for years. Thoroughly skilled in the martial arts, the Fox is an arch enemy of Li Mu Bai, and an adversary never to be underestimated.
LO	A mysterious stranger. Lo (20s) is a powerfully handsome man with a burning intensity and a secret quest.

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Note: All martial arts scenes are underwritten here, as they will be scripted and choreographed during pre-production in China. Rest assured that the production is aiming at the most entertaining, daring, and exquisite martial arts scenes ever filmed.

EXT. BEIJING STREET -- DAY

A crowded thoroughfare in the early nineteenth century, during the Ching Dynasty. Street vendors, workers pulling carts, important-looking bureaucrats moving in a jumble of urban cacophonies.

Two handsome carriages wend their way slowly through the crowded street, accompanied by retainers on horse and foot. A few of the bystanders notice the sumptuous curtains blocking the view into the second carriage.

Close on the carriage: A hand pulls back a curtain, as a pair of eyes discreetly surveys the street scene outside.

INT. CARRIAGE/BEIJING STREET -- DAY

MAY WONG, 20, stunningly beautiful, looks pensively out onto the street. Her GOVERNESS, 40s, sits across from her.

GOVERNESS
Your first view of Beijing. Quite a change from the Territories.

May doesn't respond.

GOVERNESS
Your parents will be pleased to see you.

Still no response.

GOVERNESS
Now that your father has been named chief magistrate, with his power, and with your beauty, all Beijing will wait upon you.

May finally pulls closed the curtain, and turns toward the Governess.

MAY
You know as well as I Beijing is nothing more than a prison to me.

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EXT. GATE TO WONG COMPOUND -- DAY

The carriages approach the gate to the Wong compound, at which a number of armed and self-important servants stand watch in front of the bustling street. They rush out to greet the carriages and shoo away passersby, as well as a small crowd that has gathered around a pair of street jugglers -- TSAI, 40s, burly and self-possessed, and his daughter SUE, early 20s, pretty and lithe.

TSAI
And now, ladies and gentlemen see her fly!

As the jugglers perform a particularly difficult trick, Wong's servants rudely push them aside to the disgruntlement of some in the crowd, which quickly disperses.

SERVANT #1
Out of the way you fools, or you'll answer to Chief Wong himself!

CROWD
(ad lib)
Piss off! Let 'em finish at least!

As the carriages pass by, Sue dusts herself off, and Tsai looks up from the muddy street into which he has been thrown to find a helping hand offered from the crowd. He takes the hand and meets HAAN, 30s, rough-around-the-edges but handsome.

TSAI
Thanks.

HAAN
Nice show, while it lasted.

Sue has come up and joined her father.

TSAI
We'll be back. I guess Chief Magistrate Wong has little patience for us little folk when his important guests arrive.

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HAAN
Ah, don't disrespect Wong. He's the first decent magistrate we've had in this town in years. Mark my words - his coming to Beijing is going to bring big changes.

TSAI
You act like you know what you're talking about.

Haan puffs up a bit, obviously trying to flirt with Sue.

HAAN
I do! I am in the service of none other than Sir Te. And when he and Wong join forces, you can bet the criminal element here in Beijing will suffer.

SUE
At the very least it sounds exciting. Will you involve yourself in this task?

HAAN
Why of course. I am often entrusted with Sir Te's security, and (making a chopping gesture with his arm) I will chop down anyone who dares to subvert him.

SUE
Ahh.

HAAN
And by the way, I have many friends in the theatrical community. I'm sure I could introduce you to people who might help you find your place on the real stage -- I like your moves.

TSAI
Thank you, but I'm afraid that won't be necessary. We have our own connections. In fact, Sue, we must be going now.

He pulls his daughter away, but she turns briefly back and gives him a slight smile. Haan smiles gamely back.

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When out of earshot, Tsai addresses his daughter.

TSAI
What an idiot!

He notices that Sue might not be agreeing with him, and softens.

TSAI
Though he might be useful to us.

Back at the Wong gate, Haan approaches the gatekeepers.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE WONG COMPOUND -- DAY (CONT'D)

A procession of powerful fighters -- the Chinese equivalent of "samurai" -- walks down the center of the street, as people part for them obligingly.

At the head of the group is the beautiful YUI, late 20s. She is dressed and armed similarly to the other fighters, and is obviously their leader.

The column, with Yui's company flag flying at its head, turns a corner. A number of people run following.

EXT. DEPOT - DAY

Yui's men unload wagons as clerks check off the goods from inventory lists.

YUI
I trust it is all in order?

MERCHANT
I am sure everything has arrived safely. Your security service is the most reliable. If I may say, your father, bless his soul, would be proud of how you run his company.

YUI
Thank you. Under the Yui flag we pass through the nine provinces without fear.

MERCHANT
How long do you plan on staying in Beijing?

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YUI
I haven't yet decided. My men will move on tomorrow, but I think I'll stay for a bit.

INT. WONG EAST PAVILLION ROOM -- DAY

May enters and greets her mother, MRS. WONG.

MRS. WONG
Daughter! Was it a frightful trip? No, I can see it wasn't. Or if it was, you certainly don't show it. I hope the governess wasn't a frightful bore, but I'm glad your father and me went ahead -

MAY
You know I would have liked to have come with you -

MRS. WONG
Yes, but I wanted everything in order before presenting you to Beijing society, and you should have seen the mess this place was in, and while I can't say everything is completely in order, but I did work hard on your rooms, which I know is trivial compared to the news your father wants to discuss, but he has instructed me not to talk to you about it and all, which is correct, don't you think, but of course you don't think, because you don't know what I'm talking about then, do you?

MAY
You are talking about someone father has found for me to wed.

MRS. WONG
Ah! But I didn't tell you, did I? No, you guessed it yourself!

May hardly looks happy.

INT. MAY'S ROOMS - NIGHT

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May organizes her things at a vanity. She hears the sounds of the city outside her window.

INT. TAVERN/BROTHEL - NIGHT

A crowded tavern, filled with patrons and whores. Haan takes a seat on a crowded bench, next to a handsome loner (LO) whose clothing makes him obviously out to be from the countryside.

PATRONESS
What's your pleasure Haan?

HAAN
Wine!

PATRONESS
(with a glance toward a girl)
Nothing else?

HAAN
No thanks! Just wine and song tonight.

But by the end of his sentence, Haan's mood has suddenly changed. He quickly stands up, frowning, as a mean-looking man, Lhizong, smilingly approaches him.

LHIZONG
No interest in women, Haan? Perhaps you lost the ability, the last time you and I met.

HAAN
Lhizong, you're back in Beijing. Sir Te will not be pleased.

LHIZONG
Surprised to see me, eh? Tell your master he's got nothing to worry about on my score. Now that he and Chief Wong have vowed to clean up the streets of Beijing, people like me are just going to have to mend our ways, aren't we? In fact, as a token of my new civility, let me raise a toast to your master.

HAAN
Okay.

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Lhizong raises a bowl of wine as if to drink from it, and then slowly pours it out onto the table in front of him.

HAAN
That will cost you!

LHIZONG
You think so?

Haan pushes back into a martial arts stance. Immediately ten bad guys stand up behind Lhizong and do the same. Everyone else clears swiftly and silently to the sides of the room.

HAAN
Hmmm.

Before Haan can respond further, he notices that one man has failed to clear out - the handsome countryman sitting beside him, who continues loudly to slurp his soup and guzzle his wine as if nothing is happening around him. Everyone's attention turns to him as he lets out a large burp and slowly rises, yawning.

HAAN
Who are you?

LO
Tell me one thing. This master of yours, is he a just man?

HAAN
Sir Te? The most just in Beijing.

LO
Fine. Now, you see this whip?

Haan looks to a lengthy whip that Lo raises slightly by his side.

HAAN
Yes, but -

LO
Good. Now count to three, and then start running.

With that, Lo wraps the whip around Lhizong, spins him furiously until he flails, like a top, into his men, five of whom topple beneath him. The rest leap into action, as Haan and Lo make a run for it. At the doorway, Lo manages to snap off the nose of one of the baddies, and the rest turn tail.

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EXT. BEIJING STREET - NIGHT

Haan and Lo turn a corner, out of breath from running, and rest.

HAAN
That Lhizong - it's bad news with him back in town.

LO
He some kind of criminal boss?

HAAN
Him? No. But that's just the point - he always works for someone nasty. I wonder whose service he's in now. (turning to Lo) I owe you a big thanks, brother. What can I do for you?

LO
For me, there's nothing to do.

HAAN
C'mon! I can tell by those rags your wearing that you haven't been in Beijing long. I'm sure I could help you with something.

LO
In fact I just got here this evening from the Territories. (holding up his whip) I have horses to trade. But really, I have no need of assistance. Just share some wine with me the next time we cross paths. And take care of yourself!

Int. sir te's compound - day

Servants and retainers bow as SIR TE moves swiftly with his entourage through the various rooms of his compound. He passes by a banquet table laid out with sumptuous dishes and pauses.

TE
Good work, men. We must make this an auspicious welcome for our guests.

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Te walks through a hall and into a courtyard where a number of men are doing martial arts exercises. They stop and stand at attention as Te walks before them.

TE
Excellent, men. Please continue.

They go back into formation as he takes a quick look, and goes inside.

INT. GREAT HALL -- SIR TE'S - DAY -- LATER

At the front of the hall, SIR TE sits beside CHIEF WONG. In a side room nearby sit May and Mrs. Wong with their attendants. A crowd of officials, servants, and other important guests stand and sit around the center floor. The crowd quiets down as Te addresses them.

TE
In honor of Chief Wong's installation as head judge here in the capital, I have arranged for a little entertainment -- a demonstration of the martial arts skills of some of our best men. (to Wong) If the ladies will not be overexcited by what follows, they may of course watch.

CHIEF WONG
Daughter. Wife.

Wong nods to his wife and daughter, who rise and sit facing into the hall.

CHIEF WONG
We have heard of your generous patronage of the martial arts, and of the power they instill.

TE
A strong government needs not only force but art to govern well. And these men are artists of the highest order. But even so, not one of them is stronger than you, for you embody justice - and justice vanquishes all.

Te claps his hands, and the demonstration begins. We see Haan and other members of Te's household briefly perform martial

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arts, as an attendant makes his way to Sir Te and whispers something in his ear.

TE
Our demonstration must be delayed.

Murmurs throughout the hall.

TE
For Yui Hsui Lien and her men have just arrived! Please invite them in.

Yui and her consorts sweep into the room to much applause. Sir Te is clearly pleased.

TE
My beloved Yui -- this is truly an honor. I can think of no better reason than seeing you again to interrupt our demonstration.

YUI
Sir Te, the honor is ours. And I think you need not stop your demonstration, as we may have something to add to it.

One of her retinue walks forward holding a large case, which Yui opens to reveal a beautiful jade-handled sword. She lifts it from the case and displays it to Te.

YUI
This jade sword is a gift to you, Sir Te, from Li Mu Bai, for helping to clear his name from the politically motivated charges that have kept him from Beijing during these past years. He is hopeful that its delivery to you will presage his own arrival. Li Mu Bai won the sword back after it was stolen by a breakaway faction of his revered Wu Dong school of martial arts. It represents the highest aspirations of his fighting and spiritual tradition.

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TE
Lovely. But you know, clearing Li Mu Bai's name was not my doing alone. We all have Chief Wong to thank, whose impartial investigation and judgement led to Li Mu Bai's rehabilitation. It will be a pleasure to receive Li Mu Bai again -- he is the greatest fighter of all China, and his services in the cause of right and justice will be greatly welcome here! Now, let's see this sword at work, shall we! And afterwards you and your men shall dine and lodge here.

YUI
Yes, Sir Te.

Yui raises the sword. Immediately her men position themselves and fly back and forth in front of her, jumping, leaping, flipping, kicking, deftly missing the sword by inches, in sync with Yui's ever-more-complicated moves. Soon, they bring forward various objects, throwing them through the air as Yui slices each one expertly with the sword. Next, thick blocks of wood, then stone, and finally iron are deftly cut open, to the astonishment and applause of the crowd.

Sir Te and the crowd, Haan included, applaud wildly; May and her Governess, who sits behind her, look quietly on.

INT. TE STUDY -- DAY

Music and laughter can be heard from the nearby great hall, as May and the Governess walk casually into the study. They look up to see Yui and two of her men placing the sword into its case on a low table.

MAY
Oh, I'm sorry if we are interrupting.

YUI
Not at all. I do hope you enjoyed the demonstration.

MAY
Yes, well, it was certainly quite different -- I'm not used to such things. But the sword, the handle was so beautiful.

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YUI
(gesturing to it)
Please, come.

Yui lifts it up as May approaches.

YUI
It was made 400 years ago, and was passed down from Wu-dang master to Wu-dang master until just 10 years ago, when a gang of traitors took possession of it. Li Mu Bai single-handedly destroyed them and carried back this prize.

MAY
It's beautiful.

Yui extends it to May, who, upon taking it almost drops it.

MAY
So heavy!

Yui laughs, and takes it back from her, replacing it in the case, which is carried into the back of the room and stood guard over by the two men.

The women sit as servants approach with a tea setting.

MAY
It must be so exciting, being a woman martial artist and all, travelling everywhere, fighting bandits and evildoers. You and Li Mu Bai, you're so very famous - often my maids and I have stayed up nights listening to stories of your adventures and romances. It's so terribly exciting.

YUI
I'm sure these adventure stories are no more than fairy tales. And as for romance --

MAY
I'm sorry if I was indiscreet; it's just that everyone is so in awe of you and Li Mu Bai. You are so - I don't know how to put it - so free.

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YUI
Don't worry, there's nothing you could be indiscreet about. And I cannot resent your thinking of my life as one of freedom. But what you think of as freedom is in fact adherence to the strictest of rules. For people of my class, you see, it's all very simple.

MAY
But you fighters these days may choose your masters, and change them at your will.

YUI
That's true. But I still must serve -- my security business depends far more on relationships and respect than on martial arts skill, I can assure you. I am still a servant, and for that I need a master.

MAY
In that all women are the same. Soon my father will name my new master to whom I shall submit as wife.

YUI
And so, heaven willing, you will enjoy the rule over many children.

MAY
I think that is at best a temporary kingdom, no?

YUI
But it is, I think, the only one we women have.

May just responds with a shy smile.

INT. TE ROOM - DAY (CONT'D)

Te takes Chief Wong aside.

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TE
I'm sorry you will be burdened with such an enormous task.

WONG
That's why I'm here, and why we have joined forces together.

TE
It's true. The city has been nothing more than a battleground for warring criminals. People have lost faith in the government.

WONG
Already order is beginning to be restored.

TE
Yes, but watch yourself. This isn't like policing out in the Territories, where bandits could be beaten head on. Here, the problem is more subtle, the criminals more devious. Chances are, the ones you've caught were sent to you, to distract you from the real powers that be. And I warn you, too, a lot of unsavory types are starting to make their way back into the city. Why, and at whose request, I can't yet say.

WONG
All I can do is remain vigilant and clear-headed, and continue to rely on your good counsel.

TE
For now, I can't fault you for anything. You're making a good match for your daughter will also help, for the Gou clan is among the most powerful and noble of our allies. Their strength will also be of help to you.

EXT. BEIJING STREET - DAY

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The Wong carriages wend their way through the streets, accompanied by a number of guards.

EXT. WONG COMPOUND GATES AND STREET -- DAY

The carriages approach, and the Wong servants again fan out and push back passersby, including, again, the jugglers Tsai and Sue.

As the carriages enter through the gates, Tsai looks up to find Haan looking down at him again.

HAAN
Maybe you should find another spot!

TSAI
I like this one just fine.

Haan helps him up, and, thinking Tsai can't see, trades a flirtatious glance with Sue.

TSAI
What brings you back here?

HAAN
Sir Te has instructed me to keep an eye out for the safety of Chief Wong and his family - you know, just a discrete professional checking in, now and again.

SUE
I hope they're not in danger.

TSAI
Not as long as they've got my boss looking out for them.

INT. WONG HOUSE -- DAY (CONT'D)

Wong addresses his wife.

WONG
An alliance with the Gou family will cement our position permanently. They are a noble and just clan, and already aligned with Sir Te and our other allies.

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MRS. WONG
And they're very rich!

WONG
(a bit annoyed)
Yes.

MRS. WONG
But then that goes without saying, but what can be said is that the older Gou son almost married the Hsiang girl, that is until she was killed in that ridiculous accident -- apparently a pot fell on her head!

WONG
To be clear, the nuptial vows had never formally been entered into before her demise --

MRS. WONG
And although he's not as good looking as his younger brother --

WONG
-- Mrs. Wong!

MRS. WONG
Well, at least can I forewarn May about the ears, you know...?

She gestures to her ears and makes a funny face.

WONG
I have asked the Gou family to allow us to receive them. Explain to May what you will.

INT. TE STUDY -- EVENING

Haan walks by the study, inside of which Yui can be seen replacing the sword in its case, accompanied by two of her men. Haan nonchalantly tries to step into the room.

HAAN
Mind if I just take a peek at the sword? For professional reasons.

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HEAD SERVANT
(blocking Haan)
Now shoo. Don't disturb Yui Hsui Lien!

HAAN
All right all right.

He turns to walk away, then, in a surprise move, spins back around. Both of Yui's men immediately leap into defensive postures, ready for attack.

HAAN
(backing up)
Only kidding!

INT. WONG COMPOUND ROOM -- DAY

The Wong and Gou families are seated. MR. GOU, a bit sanctimonious, but obviously calling the shots, continues.

MR. GOU
My son has composed a poem in honor of the Wong clan. (turning to him). Read it.

Young GOU isn't bad looking, but there <u>is</u> something funny about his ears.

GOU
Yes, father. "How great the giant pine tree, which stands erect on the hill over the valley. It looks down on everything else in the world."

Silence. Mr. Gou is clearly proud.

INT. MAY ROOMS -- NIGHT

May is undressing for bed as the Governess readies to go. A maid puts away various odds and ends.

MAY
So I have seen my fate.

GOVERNESS
The date is not set; the vows are not finalized.

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MAY
It is inevitable, and you know it. Why pretend otherwise? It's as if you wanted this marriage.

GOVERNESS
My dear May, I have been your governess for 8 years. Of course, this marriage will change things. But, believe it or not, all of my work with you has led precisely to this.

May
How is that possible?

Governess
Trust me, and you'll see. Good night, May.

MAY
Good night.

EXT. TE COMPOUND -- NIGHT

Silence.

INT. TE COMPOUND -- NIGHT

Various angles of the sleeping household.

INT. TE STUDY -- NIGHT

Haan quietly walks up to the study door, muttering to himself.

HAAN
Hell if I can't take a look at the thing. Snobs!

He reaches the door, but finds it locked.

HAAN
Locked, eh?

He fumbles for a key in his pocket. Finding it, he gently inserts it and opens the door. In the moonlit room, he can make out a masked figure opening the sword case and remove the jade sword.

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HAAN
What the--?

The figure notices Haan as he makes charges into the room, and gracefully flips over him and out the room.

Shouting, Haan turns and gives chase.

INT. YUI'S ROOM AT SIR TE'S - NIGHT

Yui wakes up in a flash, hearing the muffled sounds of the chase.

INT. TE COMPOUND -- NIGHT

The sound of running and shouting, as lamps are lit and more men join the chase.

EXT. TE COMPOUND COURTYARD -- NIGHT

Haan sees the figure climb the gate and jump down into the street and away. He rather clumsily climbs over the gate.

EXT. BEIJING STREET -- NIGHT

Haan, running, sees the figure turn a corner.

EXT. BEIJING STREET -- NIGHT

As Haan turns the corner, he stumbles over a couple of drunkards, and loses the figure's trail.

He stands helplessly in the middle of the deserted street.

HAAN
Shit!

Just as he dejectedly begins to head back, he hears sounds of a struggle in a nearby street.

HAAN
Aha!

He runs off to find the fight.

EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF WONG WALL -- NIGHT

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Haan turns the corner and, in the darkness, can barely make out a tremendous fight in progress, with the masked figure doing battle against none other than the juggler Tsai and his daughter Sue. As Tsai and Sue back the figure against the wall of the Wong compound, the figure performs an amazing backward vault over the wall, and disappears.

Haan runs breathlessly up to Tsai.

HAAN
My God, you almost got him!

TSAI
Got who?

HAAN
The masked man! With the sword.

TSAI
What are you talking about? There was no masked man. It was just Sue and me practicing some moves.

HAAN
(suspicious)
Huh? That's preposterous! You're lying!

TSAI
(menacing)
What are you accusing us of? Now beat it!

Sue falls in with her father. They inch toward Haan, who backs off.

HAAN
I don't know what you two are up to, but I'll find out!

INT. TE GREAT HALL -- NIGHT

A group is gathered at one end of the hall, with a tired but angry-looking Te seated before them. Haan stands in the corner.

TE
Incredible... (to Haan) You, Haan, you are the only witness. Who was this thief?

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HAAN
I couldn't quite make him out. But he was. Well, he jumped - very high!

TE
He jumped?

HAAN
Like - whoosh!

TE
Like - whoosh?

HAAN
That's right. But I can tell you, Sir Te, I will find this culprit, have no doubt!

Yui pushes her way forward.

YUI
I, sir, should be in charge of this investigation. The sword was taken while I was a guest of your household. I feel responsible.

TE
It's not your fault, Yui Hsui Lien, though of course I accept the offer of your services. But what my real concern is keeping this quiet until we can get the thing back. I will lose great face if my enemies can show that I can't even maintain order in my own house! And seeing it's a gift from Li Mu Bai, this theft is also a slap in the face of our new Chief Wong, who has so helpfully cleared his name. Someone seeks to discredit our new alliance - but who could it be?

HAAN
Sir --

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YUI
I will find out. And, by the way (turning to Haan), where have you been -- you already made one unsuccessful attempt on the sword earlier today!

HAAN
Who? Me?

EXT./INT. VIEW INTO MAY'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Through the tree branches, we see May and the Governess in what appears to be a heated dispute, though we can't hear what they are saying.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE WONG COMPOUND -- NIGHT (CON'T)

Reverse angle on Tsai and Sue, in the branches of a tree, looking into the compound at May's room. They glance at each other, then gracefully drop to the ground and walk away.

EXT. TSAI'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Tsai and Sue enter their humble house off of a small side street. As they enter, a light goes on inside. It's glow lightly illuminates the face of LO (the country stranger who we saw earlier helping rescue Haan), who emerges from the shadows -- he has been following them. He pauses before their door, then moves on, disappearing into the night.

EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF WONG GATE -- DAY

Tsai and Sue perform for a small crowd. In the back of the crowd is Haan, who peels off, unseen by the performers, and walks around the corner.

EXT. SIDE STREET NEXT TO WONG COMPOUND -- DAY (CONT'D)

Haan looks about, then stacks some crates and debris so as to climb up and get a look over the wall into the compound. As he climbs up, his rickety pile starts to totter, then fall, spilling him onto the ground. A few passersby give him odd looks. He dusts himself off and moves along.

From behind a column across the street, Yui emerges. She has been spying on him. A frown crosses her brow.

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INT. MAY'S ROOM -- DAY

A messenger enters, finding May practicing calligraphy. The Governess sits and reads beside her.

MESSENGER
Miss, Yui Hsui Lien awaits at the gate, requesting an interview.

GOVERNESS
Tell her to go away --

MAY
No. I'd like to see her. Please escort her in, and prepare a tea.

May rises, giving the Governess a sidelong glance.

INT. MAY'S ROOM -- DAY

May and Yui stand before the calligraphy.

YUI
It's quite extraordinary. I must admit, not being so highly educated myself, that I'm a bit jealous.

MAY
To me it's simply a form of relaxation. I often forget the meaning of the words as I write them - it doesn't really seem to matter if it makes sense, until after I'm done.

May dips the brush and draws a couple of characters.

YUI
You are highly trained -- that's rare for a woman. It's striking -

MAY
What is?

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YUI
How similar calligraphy is to swordsmanship - it requires the same flow of energy and strength. I've often watched Li Mu Bai writing - it's very much like watching him fight.

MAY
I'm sure my strokes are mere scribbling compared to his.

YUI
My apologies, I didn't mean to disparage you.

MAY
Don't think anything of it. I have heard a great deal of Li Mu Bai's skills - and of your…admiration for them.

YUI
(a tiny bit flustered)
My admiration is solely in proportion to his skills.

A curtain in the corner of the room flutters lightly. The Governess, hidden behind a panel, is listening in. We get the idea that Yui has sensed her presence.

MAY
I'm sorry if I was being forward. It's just that one hears so many wonderful stories, about the two of you, being such legendary figures. You must know you are often paired in the public's imagination as a perfectly matched couple.

YUI
Of course those kind of rumors circulate. But Li Mu Bai and I, we, well we honor certain customs. You see, a long time ago my family promised me to a young man, who died before the wedding could take place.

MAY
Did you love him?

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YUI
I'd never met him, in fact. But he is my betrothed. One can only assume he awaits me in the next life.

MAY
In the next life! And you believe that?

YUI
It is the custom. You, too, have been betrothed if I hear correctly. I know you will find more happiness in your marriage than I found in mine.

MAY
Perhaps.

INT. MAY'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Moonlight spills into the room, as May rises sleeplessly from bed and looks out the window. A light breeze stirs her hair. The sound of wind rises, and slowly her face dissolves, into...

INT./EXT. CARRIAGE/MONGOLIAN DESERT -- DAY (FLASHBACK)

....the face of a younger, less sophisticated May, as she lets the dry desert air flow through her hair. She sits in a carriage, part of a small train of wagons, with guards on horseback, that is travelling through the spectacular desert. Across from her sits her mother, of whom she is barely cognizant.

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MRS. WONG
I know it's further away and all, but your father will now be in charge of all the Western Territories, not just one province. If he fulfills his promise with this appointment, who knows but that Beijing will be next? But what a job! With all these bandits about. And the clothes these barbarians wear, I suppose they can't help it, but if it's indecent I'll not want you...May? May? Are you listening to me?

May is still looking out the side of the carriage. Across the desert, a sandstorm begins to form....

INT. MAY'S ROOM -- NIGHT

May sighs, and turns back toward her bed.

EXT. STREET BESIDE WONG COMPOUND -- NIGHT

Tsai and Sue drop again from the tree outside the compound.

EXT. TSAI'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Tsai and Sue enter the house.

INT. TSAI'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Inside the tiny house, they discover a hooded figure going through their belongings.

Immediately, they attack. The figure ducks, dodges, and feints, finally managing to get outside. They follow.

EXT. TSAI'S HOUSE -- NIGHT (CONT'D)

Tsai pounces on the masked figure, who struggles free, but in the process loses his mask. It's Haan.

HAAN
All right already! Stop stop stop!

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TSAI
You've got some explaining to do.

HAAN
Look, what I told you before is true. I work for Sir Te, and the other night, someone stole Li Mu Bai's jade sword -- I mean the sword that Yui Hsui Lien had delivered from Li Mu Bai for Sir Te because Sir Te had gotten Chief Wong to help Li Mu Bai to clear his name. So when I saw you with the thief who had entered the Wong compound and I thought why would you be covering for the thief and then again why would the thief go into the Wong compound I was confused. So I thought I'd better investigate. (beat) Because, like I said, I was confused...

Tsai looks at Sue, who gives a shrug.

TSAI
And are you less confused now?

HAAN
I, uh, well - What?!

Unexpectedly, Tsai leaps at Haan, and tackles him to the ground, as a knife whizzes through the air, just missing Tsai's head, and sticking in their door. Sue screams.

TSAI
What?

They all look to see another figure turn on its heels and run away.

HAAN
Let's get him!

TSAI
(getting up)
No, he's gone.

HAAN
Thanks!

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TSAI
Don't be silly. That knife was meant for me.

Tsai pulls the knife from his door.

HAAN
So who's after you?

Tsai turns to his daughter, who nods.

SUE
Explain, father.

TSAI
Well, you know your jade sword?

HAAN
Yes.

TSAI
I couldn't care less about it. I'm not after a sword, but I am hunting -- for a Fox. I'm a police inspector from out West, and some years ago I thought Fox's gang had been broken up -- by none other than Li Mu Bai himself. He'd taken them all on, and even captured that sword you're now so desperate to find. Well, soon the Fox's criminal activities became apparent again, and I was close to making a capture when Fox killed my wife in an attempt to scare me off. We got a tip that Fox is attached to Chief Wong's household, so we came here to Beijing.

HAAN
So Chief Wong is mixed up in this?

TSAI
I doubt it -- he's a good man. It's probably someone who has taken cover in his retinue. From what I can gather, the gang itself formed in rebellion to Li Mu Bai's Wu-dang school of martial artists.

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HAAN
So Fox must have been the thief! Let's join forces together.

TSAI
I don't see why not. But be careful. Fox has eyes and ears everywhere.

HAAN
Tomorrow then. We'll plan our next step.

He leaves and Tsai and Sue enter the house.

Once again, the powerfully built stranger, Lo, emerges from the nearby darkness and walks on.

INT. TE STUDY -- DAY

Sir Te speaks to Yui.

TE
I have received a letter today -- Li Mu Bai will be arriving any day now.

YUI
And the sword shall be back before he arrives. I am forming a strong idea of where it might be.

TE
I have no doubt, though if it's not returned by the time he gets back Li Mu Bai will certainly wish to join the hunt himself.

YUI
There'll be no need for that.

TE
But that isn't why I wanted to talk to you. You know I was a good friend to your late father, and I've always thought of you as something of a daughter to me.

YUI
And I share those filial emotions.

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TE
Then let me talk to you if I may not about my missing sword, but about something you are missing.

YUI
And what is that?

TE
Happiness.

YUI
Sir Te -

TE
Now let me finish. No one knows better than I do the gravity of law and tradition. And I would never urge anyone lightly to compromise allegiance to our customs. But you and Li Mu Bai are as children to me. I see the greatness that is in each one of you -- as well as the stubborn pigheadedness that keeps you apart. Don't allow old habits to cloud what's truly important to you. And besides, you are both getting along in years - it's about time to stop this incessant wandering. Why not accept some joy into your lives - and as a Manchu royal, and your godfather, I can take care of the arrangements and place both of you in Beijing society. So that, my dear, is the end of my lecture. You needn't argue or agree with me. Just know that I'm thinking only of your happiness.

YUI
That I will never doubt.

TE
You'll never have reason to.

He rises, leaving Yui sitting with her thoughts.

INT. MAY'S ROOM -- DAY

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May combs her hair pensively. Her reverie is interrupted by a fracas at the compound's front gate.

EXT. WONG COMPOUND GATE -- DAY

Tsai and Sue are banging on drums and yelling taunts, as Wong's guards try to keep them from getting in.

TSAI
We know you're in there Fox! Why don't you come out and show yourself!

GUARD #1
If you don't clear out, we'll put you under arrest! And you won't like the punishment Chief Wong will dole out!

SUE
Then come on, arrest us. We'd like nothing better than to meet Chief Wong!

Suddenly, the gates open, and a maid rushes out to address Tsai.

MAID
Excuse me! You jugglers are to come inside. You are invited to perform at the invitation of Miss May Wong. Please!

A bit stunned, the guards widen the gates to allow Tsai and Sue into the courtyard.

EXT. WONG COURTYARD -- DAY

May watches the duo perform politely. The Governess also watches discreetly with the other household servants. As one trick is finished, Tsai announces the next.

TSAI
Our next performance is a little play called "Hunter catches Fox," in which the miserable animal is tracked down and eventually destroyed.

He takes a long pole and proceeds to chase and lance Sue in an elaborate ballet of dance and leaping. But as the show progresses, May's composure becomes ever more tenuous.

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TSAI
And now for Fox's death!

May stands up, cutting the performance short.

MAY
That will be all!

As Tsai turns to face her, his pole catches Sue's leg. She tumbles over and falls with a crash, lying unconscious. A crowd of servants rushes to help, and in the crush a hand secretly slips a note into Tsai's pocket as he bends over his daughter.

TSAI
Daughter! Please awake! (asking May) Perhaps there is a doctor here in the household who might help to nurse her?

MAY
No. (to the servants) Take them out.

She walks back to her rooms. Tsai picks the prostrate Sue up and carries her.

TSAI
You rich people have no heart!

EXT. WONG COMPOUND GATE -- DAY (CONT'D)

Tsai carries Sue out to the street, where Haan has been waiting, and lays her gently before him, as the gates close loudly behind them.

Sue immediately rises and dusts herself off -- she had only been faking in an attempt to stay in the compound.

SUE
We may not have our Fox, but it is certainly in our sights.

Haan helps Tsai pick up his scattered juggling equipment.

EXT. COMPOUND COURTYARD -- DAY (CONT'D)

From behind a crack in the compound wall, the Governess watches them as they walk off. Another man trails behind them, and stops briefly to trade a knowing glance with the

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Governess - it's Lhizong, the gangster we saw fight Haan earlier in the tavern.

INT. TSAI HOUSE -- DAY

Haan, Sue, and Tsai enter. Tsai starts to pull off his jacket, noticing the note in his pocket.

TSAI
What's this?

He reads aloud.

TSAI
"If you wish to hunt the real Fox, await me at midnight tonight atop Cemetery Hill, outside the city walls. We shall settle this matter one on one, with honor" Hah! At last!

EXT. CEMETARY HILL -- NIGHT

Under the full moon, Tsai arrives with Haan and Sue. They gather under a majestic tree that sits atop the hill.

SUE
I've brought some food. We might as well eat while we wait.

HAAN
Great! I'm starving.

Tsai refuses an offer from Sue. He looks out down the road, but sees no one coming.

Suddenly, a masked figure drops down from the tree above.

Haan spits out his food, as he and Sue hastily stand.

TSAI
Take off your mask, Fox. No one but a coward hides his face.

FOX
All right, Tsai.

The figure pulls off the mask, revealing none other than -- the Governess!

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HAAN
(whispering to Sue)
Who's that?

SUE
I've no idea, but I know I've seen her before.

Suddenly, Fox lets out a bloodcurdling scream and flies into Tsai.

Quickly she gains the upper hand with her lightning-quick and unusual moves, forcing Tsai further and further down the hill.

Haan moves to join in, but Sue grabs his shoulder.

SUE
But my father insisted this be an honorable duel.

HAAN
Forget that! She'll kill him!

SUE
You're right.

They both run after the fighting Tsai and Fox, leaping into the fray.

Fox is now herself quickly outmaneuvered, and backs down onto the road at the foot of the hill.

FOX
Damn you all!

She turns and runs as a masked horseman gallops up. Fox does a flip onto the back of the horse. As the horse rears and is turned around, Tsai calls out.

TSAI
Aren't you forgetting something, Fox?

FOX
What?

TSAI
Your knife.

And so saying, he pulls out from a hidden leg-sheath the knife that had almost killed him, and throws it. But in an astonishing move, Fox grabs the knife in mid-flight, flips it, and flings it at Tsai, hitting him squarely in the chest.

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Tsai falls, instantly dead, as Fox and the horseman gallop off.

Sue drops to the ground, cradling her dead father's head. Haan kneels beside her.

INT. MAY'S ROOM -- NIGHT

May enters the room, dropping to the floor. Tears silently begin to fall down her cheeks. We hold on her face, as it dissolves again...

INT./EXT. CARRIAGE/MONGOLIAN DESERT -- DAY (FLASHBACK)

...into May's younger face. She has just finished combing her hair with a beautiful, precious jade comb.

MRS. WONG
May, you should put that comb back into your bag before you lose it. It's too precious to use, if you ask me.

May looks at the comb, holding it up to the light, then looks out of the carriage again.

The storm cloud is larger now, and closer, moving towards them.

INT. MAY'S ROOM - NIGHT

May throws herself on her bed.

INT. WONG'S COURT ROOM -- DAY

Chief Wong presides over a case, when Sue and Haan enter, amid a bustle of arguing guards and courtiers.

WONG
What is this? Who dares such an entrance to my court?

SUE
Your honor, you must do something. Fox is on the loose, right here amongst your household. Why do you do nothing?

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WONG
Guards, arrest this woman! You must know that these unfounded rumors are spread solely to disparage my name -- by political enemies who will stop at nothing!

SUE
Rumor? You say it is a rumor? Is this a rumor?

Two servants carry in Tsai's body on a stretcher. There is a hush in the room. Wong himself rises, and surveys the scene in his court.

WONG
(quietly)
Tell me what man this was.

SUE
My father sir, Police Inspector Tsai.

WONG
Tsai. The great inspector from Shan-shi province? I have heard of him. He was a good man. (to Sue) Approach.

She hesitantly comes toward him.

WONG
My poor girl, I will hear your case. (to his assistant) Lee, you will sit with her and inscribe all the complaint and accompanying testimony for my consideration. I will await the documents in my chamber, and we shall try the case first thing tomorrow.

He exits the room.

INT. WONG GARDEN -- DAY

Yui sits with Mrs. Wong and May. They busy themselves with various items from her trousseau.

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MRS. WONG
It must be terribly exciting, all this running about chasing after criminals and hitting them and such.

YUI
It keeps me busy.

MRS. WONG
And how is your investigation of the missing sword proceeding?

YUI
Almost concluded.

MRS. WONG
That's excellent!

YUI
Yes. It appears that a certain Fox has shown up in Beijing -- you may have heard of her --

MRS. WONG
Her? It's a she?

YUI
Yes -- you may have heard of her, for about 8 years ago she fled Beijing after her gang had been broken up by Li Mu Bai. It is said she fled to the Western Territories, where she hid in disguise, piecing together a new underground criminal network, and only occasionally venturing forth to steal or kill.

MRS. WONG
Oh, these criminals, there's so many I can't keep track!

YUI
She is a traitor from the Wu-dang school in which Li Mu Bai was trained. In fact, the sword I am looking for was won back by Li Mu Bai after a particularly fierce battle with her gang.

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MRS. WONG
And now she has it back. Perhaps she won't bother anybody anymore now that she has her sword again.

YUI
Perhaps. But last night she struck again, killing a police inspector who had tracked her back to Beijing.

MAY
(imperceptibly trembling)
You say she killed a -- a policeman?

YUI
Yes. The inspector's daughter has just appeared in your father's court, seeking justice.

MAY
One can be sure, then, that she shall have it.

MRS. WONG
That's right! Once Chief Wong sets his sights on such a matter, there's no room for criminals!

Yui casts a glance at May, who remains inscrutable.

INT. WONG SITTING ROOM -- NIGHT

Lee enters the room with a sheaf of papers, and places them in front of Chief Wong, who sits with Mrs. Wong and May as the tea glasses are cleared.

LEE
The complaint, sir. With the witness statements.

CHIEF WONG
Thank you.

He immediately begins reading them, frowning deeply.

May rises.

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MAY
If I may be excused.

MRS WONG
Why of course. And I'm off to bed myself -- no use trying to have a conversation when he sits so glumly reading his papers like that.

CHIEF WONG
What?

MRS. WONG
You see what I mean?

INT. MAY'S ROOM -- NIGHT

By candlelight, May practices her martial arts. It's the first time we've seen her face as she does her moves. She is precise, focused, furious - a master of her craft.

The Governess, whom we now know to be the Fox, stands before her, drilling her, occasionally shouting out criticisms.

Governess
That is as a man would do it - a woman can do it better!

As the Governess shouts out each move, May responds decisively, but as the practice continues, we realize that there is more fury in May than focus. At the end of one exercise, May goes to far, punching her extended fingers forward just a hair's breadth from the Governess's eyes. The Governess stops her hand just in time, and the two women stare at each other with a suppressed fury.

MAY
You must leave this house. Instantly.

GOVERNESS/FOX
That's no way to address your master, is it?

MAY
And never return, or I shall turn you in myself.

The Governess takes a cautious step back.

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GOVERNESS/FOX
My dear, impetuous girl, I think it's time you and I had a discussion.

MAY
There is nothing to discuss.

GOVERNESS/FOX
Oh but there is. You see, I cannot leave you knowing that I have failed so clearly in the most important part of your instruction.

MAY
It is I who have failed, not you. I never saw where all this was heading.

GOVERNESS/FOX
Of course you didn't. You were just a girl - and you still are. Think back -- when I came to you eight years ago, weren't you happy that your new Governess shared her secret arts with you? It's been our secret all these years, and I'm sure you'll understand now if there were some parts of the training I had to withhold, until you were old enough to understand.

MAY
I understand well enough - what I thought of as training to a higher calling was nothing of the sort. You're nothing but a common criminal, and my childish pranks have become enmeshed in your schemes.

GOVERNESS/FOX
Perhaps you are right - in which case let me remind you that if I am in trouble, so are you. After all, who took the sword?

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MAY
I took it on a whim! You said it would be good fun. I had no idea you had so betrayed -- And how could I have known you would kill that man? You knew he was a policeman, didn't you?

GOVERNESS/FOX
Silly girl, let yourself learn these new lessons. Trust me. There is so much more for you to learn now.

MAY
I have no interest in your lessons.

GOVERNESS/FOX
But of course you do. I know. I was a student once also - of the same Wu-dang school as the famous Li Mu Bai, whose sword you stole. Yes, I was once a disciple, and pledged to the Wu-dang principles. But had I remained faithful I would never have risen to the level I have now. I have developed my fighting arts far beyond anything they would have allowed a woman to learn. And through my training I have made you the living embodiment of my art. Now that I have finally managed to make my way back to Beijing, do you believe I'll let you go this easily?

MAY
Whatever plans you have -- you don't need me.

GOVERNESS/FOX
You think not? It's you I need most of all. In making you my accomplice I protect myself, as your father will never let you be implicated. And neither will your future family, the noble Gous. No, together, as partners, we can begin our true careers.

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MAY
My father would rather die --

GOVERNESS/FOX
Don't kid yourself. Think of him, sending you, his only child, to the gallows. And what are his laws anyway? A simple illusion, that hides the real power. By day, the courtrooms make the rules. But when night falls, those of us who know the real mysteries control the streets and come and go as we please, taking what we will. You have this power -- with me -- you can rule Beijing. My cohorts are already filtering back into the city, awaiting my - our - commands. May, don't throw away the eight years of love and devotion I've given you, the skills I've secretly imparted only to you. Join with me.

MAY
Never.

GOVERNESS/FOX
We shall see. The noose is tightening around your neck, too, don't forget, and I can finish the knot anytime I wish. But for now I see it's best that I go, if you'll allow me to gather some of my things.

MAY
The sword stays.

GOVERNESS/FOX
I think not.

MAY
Think again. I said go.

The Governess makes a quick move - but May expertly deflects her, and she backs down.

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GOVERNESS/MAY
(hissing)
I am still your master - don't think you can escape your destiny!

MAY
Out!

The Governess exits.

EXT. WONG COMPOUND GATE AND STREET -- NIGHT

The Governess slips out of the compound, a small bag hung over her shoulder. She looks up at May's room briefly, then scurries down the street.

From behind a post, Lo appears, watching, thinking.

EXT. TSAI'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Haan knocks on the door, and Sue opens it.

SUE
Good evening, Haan. What is it?

HAAN
Um, I thought, with the court case and all, it would be prudent for me to, you know, stand guard. Allow me, please.

SUE
That's very sweet of you.

HAAN
You know, we'll get his killer. I know we will.

SUE
Yes. (pause) I know this sounds terrible to say, but -- I always knew he'd be killed. This morning I was furious, but now, somehow, it's as if any vengeance I could seek hardly matters. He was always going to die searching for Fox.

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HAAN
Who knows? Why don't you get some rest? I'll stay right out here.

SUE
Sure.

She closes the door and he takes a rather macho-looking stance outside in front of it.

A moment later, he hears a piercing scream from inside. He pushes frantically into the door, but it's bolted.

HAAN
Sue! Sue!

The door opens and he half flies into the room, right past Sue.

SUE
Haan!

HAAN
(looking around)
Sue!

SUE
Look.

She points to the bed, on which lie a large bag and a sheaf of paper.

Haan carefully approaches the bed, and gently lifts the bag, out of which spills a small mountain of gold coins.

SUE
And look at the letter.

HAAN
(reading)
"I ask not for forgiveness, for none can be given. But accept this offer so that you may live your life together -- with your only care the unfolding of your love for each other."

Haan looks up, embarrassed, at Sue.

HAAN
Ridiculous! What enemy is this? What kind of letter...

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SUE
And how did it get here. It wasn't there a minute ago.

HAAN
No?

He immediately tenses, and cautiously maneuvers around the small room. He pulls back a dress hanging to dry in the corner -- nothing.

SUE
Don't be silly, there's no one there.

Just then, a masked figure (who we now know to be May), drops lightly from the ceiling, turns, and runs out the door.

Haan bolts out after her.

EXT. BEIJING STREET -- NIGHT

May turns a corner, with Haan far behind.

HAAN
Stop! Ah, not again!

He runs off after her.

EXT. STREET BESIDE WONG COMPOUND -- NIGHT

The masked figure runs toward the wall -- just as Yui emerges, blocking her path. Yui bends her knees and raises her arms, ready to fight. The figure slows, crouches, and flies at Yui with all her might. In two quick moves she catches Yui with a kick that sends Yui flying into the wall.

With the figure circling confidently, Yui staggers back up and takes her position again, just as Haan arrives.

HAAN
Yui Hsui Lien!

The figure does a backward flip, landing a flying kick across Haan's jaw -- he goes unconscious immediately.

Yui and the figure go at it again. This time the fight is more of an even match, as Yui defensively dodges her opponent's moves, gradually getting the upper hand herself.

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But a quick series of moves brings Yui further and further back into the street, until she backs up next to post -- from behind which emerges none other than Li Mu Bai!

LI MU BAI
Allow me.

He steps in front of a startled Yui, pulls a sword, and decisively and powerfully flies at the masked figure.

Yui, upset, and sensing that Li Mu Bai might do some real damage, yells out to him.

YUI
Li Mu Bai. Stop this instant!

LI MU BAI
What?

YUI
You have no right interfering in my fight.

The masked figure, having sensed Li Mu Bai's advantage, makes her most astonishing leap yet, backwards over the Wong compound wall.

Li Mu Bai resheathes his sword and approaches the still dumbfounded Yui.

LI MU BAI
Hmph! Interesting moves there. And if I'm not mistaken, that was my sword.

YUI
Li Mu Bai! How dare you!

LI MU BAI
How dare I what! I heard the sound of fighting as I was arriving and --

He lifts up a groaning Haan, who is coming to, by his collar.

LI MU BAI
And who is this?

YUI
That's Sir Te's man, Haan.

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LI MU BAI
Oh.

He props Haan up against the post.

YUI
Li Mu Bai, don't you think you were a bit impolite to just stroll into Beijing and break into my fight!

LI MU BAI
I was simply saving your behind -- once again!

YUI
Don't be so patronizing. If you hadn't shown up --

LI MU BAI
So this is how you express your gratitude -- I see you're as pig-headed as ever, if a bit older.

YUI
Older, eh? (beat) I see you've put on a bit of weight, by the way.

LI MU BAI
(taking the bait for a second)
I have? Ach!

YUI
In any case, I didn't ask for your help.

LI MU BAI
And I didn't ask for anyone to steal my sword.

YUI
It was your sword, but it is now Sir Te's -- and he has asked me to retrieve it for him.

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LI MU BAI
Don't bother. Now that I'm here, I'll get it back myself. Someone behind those walls has it - it won't be hard to go in there and get it.

Haan has all the while been watching the exchange with growing incredulity.

YUI
You won't think so when you hear who those walls belong to. And in any case, I already have a good idea who the thief is.

LI MU BAI
Who?

YUI
Why would I tell a brute like you?

LI MU BAI
(to Haan)
You see how she talks to me?

HAAN
Uh, yes.

Li Mu Bai continues to look him up and down.

HAAN
Um, was I supposed to say no?

LI MU BAI
(to Haan)
Lead me and this one to Sir Te's.

They walk off, Yui and Li Mu Bai continuing to banter.

From the shadows behind a corner post, the thug Lhizong and one of his cronies emerges. He spits on the ground and walks in the other direction.

INT. WONG COURT ROOM -- DAY

Chief Wong addresses Sue.

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WONG
I have read your complaint with great care. Your description of Fox matches that of a woman who has, it seems, fled this very compound sometime last night. I am sorry to say that my own household appears to have harbored such a criminal, and I can only assure you that my men will commence inquiries immediately into her whereabouts. (rising, to his assistant) Lee, I shall hear no further cases until this matter is cleared up.

INT. SIR TE'S - DAY

Sir Te, Yui, and Li Mu Bai discuss.

LI MU BAI
Jade Fox! Of course. If I had known it was the Fox I had in my sights last night, I wouldn't have put off the fight.

SIR TE
And now, Wong tells me, this woman has left.

LI MU BAI
She can't be far.

YUI
So, Li Mu Bai. You really think your Jade Fox has the sword?

LI MU BAI
Of course. I retrieved it from her gang a decade ago. And I'll get it back from her again.

TE
You don't seem convinced, Yui Hsui Lien.

YUI
If you'll allow me, I'd like still to pursue my own leads. Li Mu Bai, you chase your Fox, but let me take my own path.

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LI MU BAI
That's fine with me. We'd probably get in each other's way anyhow.

EXT. BEIJING STREET - DAY

Li Mu Bai walks - people call out his name. Congratulations, etc. An old man walks up beside him.

OLD MAN
One hears you are seeking a certain party.

Li Mu Bai negotiates, follows the old man down a crooked alleyway, into a decrepit warehouse.

INT. BEIJING WAREHOUSE - DAY

Li Mu Bai enters as the old man scurries away. From behind stacks of oil drums emerge Lhizong and 20 of his men.

A wild fight ensues, in which Li Mu Bai's dominance is total. At the end, Li Mu Bai stands over a prostrate Lhizong, his sword ready to fall.

LI MU BAI
Jade Fox - tell me where she's hiding.

LHIZONG
You know she'd never tell me. She's too tricky for that!

LI MU BAI
This time I'll let you live, but the next time I see you, you'll either deliver Jade Fox to me, or I'll have your head.

INT. MAY'S ROOM -- DAY

A maid enters accompanied by a messenger.

MAY
What is it?

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MESSENGER
Yui Hsui Lien requests the pleasure of your company at Master Te's house for a private demonstration of martial arts.

May pauses before responding.

EXT. TE'S GARDEN -- DAY

Yui and May are served tea.

YUI
Thank you for coming. I know your wedding day is nearing -- you must be very busy with preparations.

MAY
My mother is more occupied with it than I am. I can be frank with you -- I feel no joy in the prospect.

YUI
No. I can see you are unhappy, and I wish there was something I could do, other, that is, than give you some unwanted advice.

MAY
And what advice do you think would help me know?

YUI
Simply -- do not let your unhappiness make you do reckless things. Restrain yourself, and perhaps happiness might eventually be yours.

MAY
(changing the subject)
You invited me to a demonstration of martial arts? I've not much time -- where is it?

YUI
Right here.

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So saying, she drops the small teapot she was about to pour from right over May's lap. With lightning reflexes May catches the pot.

May, holding the pot, stares fixedly at Yui, who returns her regard -- each knows the other knows, they face each other as equals.

Yui gently takes the pot from May's hands, and continues pouring.

YUI
Here. You know, I believe it would make your father happy if the thief were respectfully to return the stolen sword before his daughter's wedding. Rumors are flying throughout Beijing - runors that could harm his good name.

Before May can reply, Sir Te and Li Mu Bai appear.

TE
There you are, Yui Hsui Lien. Li Mu Bai here is getting me up to speed about the case.

YUI
You can tell him that the thief has seen the light, and the sword will be returned by sunrise tomorrow.

Li Mu Bai looks shocked. Yui and May rise.

YUI
May I introduce May Wong, Chief Wong's daughter.

LI MU BAI
It is an honor to meet you. Your father's wisdom and probity are legendary - and I am personally indebted for the justice he has rendered me.

MAY
It is an honor to meet you.

TE
And by the way, May here is soon to be married, of all things.

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Te takes Li Mu Bai's arm and continues to walk. Li Mu Bai glances back at May, seemingly troubled.

EXT. TE COMPOUND -- NIGHT

A still, dark night.

INT. TE STUDY -- NIGHT

A feeling of shadows moving through the room.

Suddenly, a lantern is lit -- it is Li Mu Bai, looking around. At his feet is the sword. He picks it up, then, hearing a noise behind him, swings around.

YUI
Find something?

He harrumphs, and puts the sword on the table.

YUI
Are you angry?

LI MU BAI
(softening)
Yes, but I shouldn't be. Sit with me. Let's drink some wine together.

Yui smiles lightly and sits as Li Mu Bai takes a decanter and pours two glasses.

They sit drinking, in silence, for a moment. Then each begins to speak at the same time, stopping again -

YUI
No, you go -

LI MU BAI
No, you --

YUI
I - My, how time flies.

LI MU BAI
Yes, it's hard to believe we knew each other when we were young.

YUI
I'm still quite young, thank you.

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LI MU BAI
Of course, I mean, we've known each other a long time. (beat) Not too long. If it were too long, then we would be old. Which we're not.

YUI
No.

They both sigh, not knowing how to gracefully continue the conversation, but not giving up either.

LI MU BAI
You know, Sir Te has offered me a position here in Beijing. He says it's time I settled down, stopped my wandering.

YUI
He's said the same to me.

LI MU BAI
He likes to give advice, eh? So, are you? Thinking of settling down?

YUI
Are you?

He looks longingly at her for a brief moment, but then the spell is broken, and he puts down his drink, rising.

LI MU BAI
I couldn't imagine it. (pausing) Good night.

YUI
Good night.

EXT. TSAI'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Sue opens the door to find Haan standing guard outside.

SUE
Here again?

HAAN
(groggy)
Of course! Absolutely.

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SUE
Wouldn't you be more comfortable inside?

HAAN
It's of course for your protection only.

SUE
Well, I'd feel more protected if you were inside with me. Please.

She opens the door wider, he goes in, and she shuts the door behind them.

INT. MAY'S ROOM -- NIGHT

From inside May's dark room, we hear her say good night to her maids.

The door opens, and she walks in, carrying a lamp.

Suddenly, she inhales deeply -- a masked figure stands from where it was sitting by the window, waiting. The mask comes off, to reveal -- Lo.

He holds the mask in his hand.

LO
Is this the latest fashion among the young ladies of Beijing?

May flies to him, punching. He holds her arm back, and she loosens, embracing him, then pushing him away.

MAY
Why? Why have you come?

LO
I couldn't take it any longer. Listen to me May; elope with me, now, tonight. We can go back West. We'll live again, live as free people, together, without the burdens of rank and social status. Come live with me. I love you.

She rests herself briefly in his arms again.

MAY
You've been trying all these years, to come back to me.

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LO
I have, May. (they disengage) I joined the army, as we agreed. But at each step, at every moment of advancement, someone would recognize me, and I'd be forced back to my old ways. When I heard you were moving to Beijing, I realized I had but one last chance to keep you. That's why I came. (pause) I am who I am, May, and the only thing I've truly learned through all these years of study and of failure is that I cannot live without you.

May is about to respond when a servant's voice is heard from outside the door.

MAY
(whispering)
Go now!

LO
May!

MAY
(through her tears)
And never, never come back!

Lo hovers in the windowframe.

LO
And that is your final word?

May pauses.

MAY
Yes.

Lo thrusts a small object into her hand.

LO
Then you may have this back.

He lifts his legs through the window, and drops out of sight, just as May's door is opened from the hall.

SERVANT
We heard voices. Are you all right?

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MAY
Why yes. It was -- I just knocked this over, by mistake. Nothing to worry about.

The servant pauses, but then dutifully exits, closing the door.

Alone once again, May opens up her palm; when she sees the object Lo gave her, she gasps. She holds it up to the light: it is a comb -- an exquisite piece -- a dragon intricately carved from the most precious, translucent jade. We dissolve on the comb to....

FLASHBACK: FOUR YEARS EARLIER

INT./EXT. CARRIAGE/MONGOLIAN DESERT -- DAY

....An image of the same comb, with daylight now shining through it. May admires the piece, her most prized possession.

Mrs. Wong sits opposite her in the carriage, part of a caravan crossing the desert, escorted by armed riders.

MRS. WONG
Really May, it makes me nervous. Please put it away. It's hundreds of years old, you know. Every bandit in the desert would certainly prize Chief Wong's daughter's prize comb.

May sullenly puts the comb back into her hair.

MAY
If Chief Wong is such a big deal, why do he and his family have to move to the middle of nowhere?

MRS. WONG
Don't be rude. It's not the middle of nowhere. (looks outside) Well, maybe it is. But nowhere is somewhere, and it's just one stop on your father's journey to heaven knows how high an official position.

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MAY
Well, if I have to be going nowhere, I'd rather be riding a horse there instead of sitting cooped up in here.

MRS. WONG
May, you're going to have to give up all your tomboyish ways now that you're becoming a young lady. We've let you do all that running about because -- well I don't know why, but we have. But now it's too dangerous with all these bandits, especially that Dark Cloud or whatever they call him.

While they have been talking the sky has darkened and the wind grown stronger.

MAY
Mother, you'd best put a towel over your face.

MRS. WONG
Now seriously, that's quite enough!

MAY
No, look. A sandstorm is coming.

Sand begins to blow against the caravan.

Too late do the guards realize that the sandstorm conceals a group of heavily armed bandits.

GUARD #1
It's Dark Cloud!

But his warning is too late. A shower of arrows fells the guards.

Mrs. Wong and May's carriage is quickly surrounded. Amid the swirling dust, a bandit reaches inside and, holding Mrs. Wong, pulls off her jewelry. Another pulls the comb from May's hair. She catches the arm of another bandit and snaps it in two, then leaps out into the blinding storm.

MRS. WONG
May! May!

EXT. MONGOLIAN DESERT -- DAY (LATER)

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All is quiet. The storm has passed. Dead bodies lay amid the ruins of the convoy. A few people stagger about.

Mrs. Wong opens the door to her carriage and steps out. She surveys the scene, but she already knows she won't find what she's looking for.

MRS. WONG
(weakly)
May....

EXT. DESERT -- DAY

May is on horseback, furiously pursuing a small group of the bandits. An expert rider, she gains quickly on them.

They rein their horses in, dismount, and await her on a bluff.

EXT. DESERT BLUFF -- DAY

May rides up and stops a respectable distance from the gathered bandits. She dismounts.

MAY
One of you dogs has my jade comb. Hand it over or you'll suffer the consequences!

The bandits laugh heartily.

She points to the biggest and ugliest among them.

MAY
You!

BANDIT #1
Me?

MAY
Yes.

He saunters over to her and stands, grinning, a few feet from her.

In a second, she's slammed his balls into his stomach and knocked his nose into his face. He crumples to the sand.

The other bandits stop laughing, quickly glance at each other, and charge her at once.

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In the ensuing melee, May appears to be everywhere at once; those who do not fall manage to drag their comrades back to their horses and flee.

When the dust settles, May -- her hair and clothes now completely disheveled -- sees that one man remains. It is Dark Cloud himself -- whom we recognize as Lo -- a dashing, arrogant figure on horseback. Slung over one shoulder is a small sack, and over the other a small bow. He grins at May with a mixture of amusement and respect.

In one hand he toys playfully with the comb. With a smile, he turns around and gallops off in a direction opposite that of the other men, as if to dare May to catch him.

MAY
Hey!

She runs for her horse and leaps on it.

EXT. DESERT -- DAY

Wide shot of the desert. We make out Lo on horseback, with May trailing behind.

EXT. DESERT OASIS -- EVENING

Lo rides up to a group of wild horses. Barely breaking his stride he leaps off of his foaming horse and on to another, spurring it off.

A beat later, May arrives. She jumps off her horse, and tries to mount a fresh one, but the horses are spooked and run from her.

EXT. DESERT -- NIGHT

Lo pauses at the top of a dune and watches as May catches up. Just as she nears, he spurs his horse again and moves on, laughing.

EXT. DESERT OASIS -- DAY

Lo is watering his horse. He watches as May rides up directly to him and flies off her horse with a leaping kick.

He continues to maneuver away from her around the watering hole.

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As she continues to pursue, and he continues to dodge, he banters with her.

LO
What's your name?

No answer but a punch.

LO
Mine is Lo -- Dark Cloud is just what those idiots call me -- to justify their fear!

She finally lands a kick in his stomach.

LO
Ouch!

He deftly spins and slaps her hard across the face.

She tumbles backwards, stunned, then jumps at him again. He ducks and she lands in the water. Before she can rise, he mounts his horse again and rides off.

EXT. DESERT -- DAY

Lo and May ride, if not side-by-side, then parallel, about 20 feet apart. Their pace has slowed considerably. In fact, they're dead tired.

LO
(shouting a bit)
Listen! There's a watering hole ahead. What do you say we call a truce, just for the night? We can rest a few hours, and then fight again tomorrow.

MAY
I don't need to rest!

LO
But your horse does, and so does mine! If we kill them, we'll both die in this desert.

EXT. WATERING HOLE -- EVENING

The horses drink side by side. Lo washes his face and drinks, as May cautiously hangs back.

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LO
Go on -- it's good!

From a sack slung over his back, Lo pulls out a small bundle of food. He apportions it into halves and holds up May's portion for her.

LO
Eh?

He tosses her the food.

May tries to hide her desperate hunger, but finally can't help herself and eats ravenously.

LO
I haven't seen you at this watering hole before, and I can assure you, I know all the girls who come here.

MAY
I bet you do. And most of them have four legs!

He laughs, rubs his stomach, and lays back, his head propped up on one arm.

May yawns but stays seated, watching as Lo gently pulls the comb through his long locks.

LO
Good night, beautiful girl.

He yawns and puts the comb into his sack.

EXT. WATERING HOLE -- DAWN

Lo awakes and rises. He looks over and sees May, blissfully asleep.

Quietly, he inches over to her, but he doesn't attack. He simply looks down at her, admiring her beauty.

Suddenly, May opens her eyes -- and leaps up with lightning rapidity.

Now they fight in earnest.

Lo's defensive moves keep May's superior fighting skills at bay. He manages to toss her far back enough to make it to his horse, which he mounts with a smile.

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LO
Farewell, pretty one.

But May isn't through with him. She pulls a small knife from a sheath on her leg and flings it at him.

Lo flips off the horse to dodge the knife, but it slices his side.

He looks down and touches the wound, looks at his bloody fingers.

LO
My! What bad manners girls are learning these days.

In the blink of an eye, he places a small arrow in his bow and shoots it at May.

May proudly lifts her hand in the air to catch it, but it pierces her hand.

MAY
Ow! That does it!

She starts to walk toward Lo, but pauses.

LO
I hope you don't mind if I dipped the arrow in a bit of poison, do you?

May drops to her knees, and, with a look of frozen fury on her face, falls forward, knocked out.

INT. ABANDONED TEMPLE -- DAY

May awakens to find herself in an abandoned temple.

Her hand has been bandaged, and she is fully dressed -- though her clothes have been repaired and cleaned.

Lo appears, sitting on a rafter above her, keeping a safe distance.

LO
I love abandoned temples, don't you? The gods don't leave -- they're still here. Just the hypocrites and monks have left.

She stares at her clothes.

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LO
Yes, they're clean. But I give you my word of honor you were not molested. (pause) Ok?

He drops down in front of her, wincing a bit from his wound.

She takes one look at his handsome face -- and attacks!

But this time the fighting spirit dissolves almost immediately -- into a passionate embrace...

INT. DESERTED TEMPLE -- EVENING

Lo and May lie together. He gently pushes back some loose strands of hair from her forehead, then smiles, and pulls out the jade comb and fixes it in her hair.

She smiles back at him. They kiss.

MONTAGE:

EXT. DESERT COUNTRYSIDE -- DAY

Lo shows May how to hunt with his bow and arrow.

EXT. DESERT -- DAY

Lo and May swiftly ride their horses.

INT. ABANDONED TEMPLE -- NIGHT

May and Lo make love.

END MONTAGE

EXT. DESERT CLIFF -- DAY

May and Lo climb to the top of the cliff.

EXT. DESERT CLIFF -- DAY

May and Lo sit looking over the desert.

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LO
There is an old story, going back many generations, of a son who leapt off this cliff. The temple we sleep in was built in honor of him.

MAY
Why would they honor someone stupid enough to jump off a cliff?

LO
You see, his parents were both dying, and he was their only son. In prayer he was given to understand that he could save them by sacrificing himself. And because of his sincerity, his fall was miraculously broken by the clouds. He landed on the ground so softly he didn't even suffer a scratch. He walked away to foreign lands, knowing that he had saved his parents, but knowing too that he would never see them again. That was his true sacrifice.

MAY
But he was alive and free. It doesn't sound like much of a sacrifice!

Mid-sentence, Lo stands and looks out carefully across the desert. He sees a distant dust cloud -- riders approaching.

MAY
Who are they?

LO
I don't know. And I don't care to find out.

INT./EXT. DESERTED TEMPLE -- MORNING

May looks out the doorway into the overgrown garden.

Lo has set a fire, and is roasting a bird. May starts to laugh.

LO
Are you laughing at me?

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MAY
No. It just came over me. I was laughing thinking of what my mother and father would say if they could see me here.

She sits by Lo.

MAY
I want to live here with you, forever.

LO
I'm sure your parents are worried.

MAY
(teasing)
Oh -- you mean to tell me the big bad bandit Dark Cloud worries about such things?

But she sees he is serious.

LO
What do I know? I never had real parents of my own.

MAY
Of course you had parents.

LO
They were killed when I was still a child. In any case, it makes me happy to see you savor your freedom here. But you see, as for mine, I never really chose it -- I've had to live free and unencumbered, just to survive.

MAY
Then choose now -- to live with me, together.

LO
As bandits in the mountains? You know as well as I do your father will soon send whole armies out to find you, and to kill me, if he hasn't already.

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MAY
I won't let that happen!

LO
(laughing)
Of course you won't. Because you'll go back to your family, to your life. I love you. But staying together is suicide.

MAY
You could give up your banditry, and marry me.

LO
I would do anything to. I have no taste for this life anymore, But I don't have to tell you how impossible that would be. We are from two different classes. And even if I gave up crime, my past would always be there to haunt me.

MAY
Lo, listen to me. If you can stay faithful to me, and work hard in these coming years, and study to pass the government exams, we could marry -- we could! My father himself came from a poor family, and worked his way up through the military -- he would understand! If you can't, I would rather stay here and die in the desert with you than go back.

LO
You can't stay. I won't allow it.

MAY
Then I'll go only if you promise me. You'll work your way back - and I will stay true to you. I promise.

LO
I'll do it. I will prove myself worthy of you.

They embrace.

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INT. DESERTED TEMPLE -- DAY

May's horse stands, ready, by the door. She turns to Lo, and gives him a kiss good-bye, then takes the jade comb out of her hair and presses it into his palms.

MAY
Keep it safe, and return it to me when we are together again.

LO
I will.

MAY
(smiling painfully)
If you don't, I'll have to chase you down, and next time, I won't go so easy on you.

EXT. DESERTED TEMPLE -- DAY (CONT'D)

May mounts her horse, and rides off, as Lo watches.

END OF FLASHBACK

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE WONG COMPOUND -- NIGHT

Lo looks up at May's house. Then turns, tearfully, away, and walks down the street.

INT. TE'S GREAT ROOM -- DAY

Sir Te sits with Yui and Li Mu Bai.

TE
The sword has been returned, but the mystery remains.

YUI
There's no mystery. I knew that once the thief saw that Li Mu Bai was back, he would become too scared to hold onto the sword.

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LI MU BAI
Why are you buttering me up with this nonsense! I can tell you're fully aware of who took the sword.

TE
Ah, Li Mu Bai. I am not worried. Perhaps the return of the sword is this Fox's way of seeking peace.

LI MU BAI
Fox will never seek peace, and we will have no peace until Fox is captured. Yui Hsui Lien, are you sure you want to keep your knowledge of this affair hidden?

YUI
Li Mu Bai, please trust me for now. And know I'll do everything in my power to help you find this Fox.

Li Mu Bai nods his assent.

INT. TSAI AND SUE'S HOUSE - DAY

Yui talks with Haan and Sue.

HAAN
Fox is gone. She's just disappeared. And in any case she's returned the sword, so your job is done -- who now will be interested in solving a provincial policeman's murder?

YUI
Jade Fox hasn't left - I can guarantee you she's still somewhere in Beijing, biding her time. And if you're asking, I am interested in solving (to Sue) your father's murder. Haan, are you willing to help me?

HAAN
Of course. Just tell me what to do.

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YUI
We'll have to be discreet - it's probable that Jade Fox already has a network of spies in place here in the city.

HAAN
Will Li Mu Bai be joining us in the chase?

YUI
I'm hoping it will be over before he needs to join - her capture will be a gift to him.

EXT. MARKET STREET -- DAY

A crowded street. There's a sense of menace underneath the ordinary hustle-bustle.

We find amid the crowd an alert and watchful Yui. She has just finished slipping a coin into the hand of a street vendor, who whispers something into her ear. She nods and moves on.

As Yui walks along, she thinks she spots Li Mu Bai across the street, and crosses to him. In the crowd, however, he is nowhere to be found. She turns, only to discover May and her mother, who are descending from a sedan, attended by a number of servants.

MRS. WONG
Ah, Yui Hsui Lien! A pleasure to see you. I heard you got that big ugly sword back to Sir Te! Bravo! I am exhausted just walking in this crowd, but my daughter insists we keep going even though she refuses to buy anything and we've been to a hundred stores and I really must pee very badly because of all the tea we've been served!

YUI
Perhaps you would allow me to relieve you of your chaperoning -- I'd be happy to accompany May, if (to May) that's agreeable to you?

MAY
I'd like nothing better.

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MRS. WONG
Lovely! And do make sure she buys something -- she needs <u>something</u> to put in her wedding trousseau before the ceremony.

Mrs. Wong returns to the sedan and waves.

INT. CLOTH MERCHANTS -- DAY

A large, luxurious establishment. Helpers bring large bolts of spectacular linens up to the seated Yui and May, as the owner pours more tea. With each nod of Yui's head, a fabric is unrolled ceremoniously.

YUI
That would go very nicely with your complexion.

MAY
I think I will buy it for my mother-in-law.

YUI
Mrs. Gou will be very pleased, both with the gift and with the giver.

MAY
I'm afraid I must disagree with you. I feel...unworthy...to take her son's hand in marriage.

YUI
That I cannot believe. I know you to be more worthy than any young woman in Beijing could be. Unless...your heart was already pledged to another.

MAY
Again we disagree. You see, I have no heart to pledge. It was taken from me, some years ago.

YUI
If you tell me who the thief is, perhaps I can help you retrieve it.

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MAY
(rising)
You had best stick to retrieving swords. From what I have heard of your own heart's affairs, I don't think you've any experience to justify offering services of any kind in this regard.

She rises to leave.

EXT. CLOTH MERCHANT'S - DAY (CONT'D)

May leaves, and walks toward her sedan. Yui stands in the doorway, sad.

May, hesitating, turns back to Yui.

MAY
Forgive me. You must know that your discretion has meant everything to me.

YUI
There's no need to ask forgiveness. Remember - I know what you are going through. And I know you're going to need all the strength in the world to keep to your path and uphold your duties.

MAY
I'm afraid, Yui Hsui Lien, afraid that I'm not strong enough.

YUI
Then call on me, whenever you need help.

MAY
I will.

May enters her sedan as Yui walks to the window.

YUI
May, I'm sorry, one last question I'm obliged -

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MAY
I know what you're about to ask - and no, my former governess has made no attempt to contact me.

YUI
You will let me know if she does?

MAY
I promise.

From across the street, behind some hanging pots, Li Mu Bai secretly watches, frowning.

INT. YUI'S ROOM AT TE'S - EVENING

Yui sits pensively, looking out a window at the blooming fruit trees.

Li Mu Bai appears with four servants, all carrying large bolts of beautiful cloth.

LI MU BAI
These were delivered to my quarters by mistake.

Yui smiles as the linens are deposited on her floor. She takes a note that's been attached to one of the bolts and reads it.

LI MU BAI
Quite a gift. Is it from a suitor?

YUI
Is that a hint of jealousy I hear?

Li Mu Bai gets serious, and gestures at the servants to leave..

LI MU BAI
Yui Hsui Lien, I know who this gift is from. This Wong girl, I have seen the way she holds herself, the way she moves. She is schooled somehow in our arts, isn't she? She's mixed up somehow with Fox, and you're mixed up somehow with her.

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YUI
She's a good girl, Li Mu Bai. I can feel it. She just needed my help. Please trust me.

LI MU BAI
If Fox has trained her, no matter what her personal qualities, she is more than likely a "poisoned dragon," and she'll cause trouble no matter what you or I do.

YUI
I can help her be free of Fox, to find her own path.

LI MU BAI
That desire is a dangerous illusion. Her path is already laid for her. With her training, how long do you think she will be able to survive as the first wife of a Beijing aristocrat. Perhaps it is best if she follows Fox's call, and briefly lives and swiftly dies in service to her master.

YUI
I know she could never do that.

LI MU BAI
Then she will submit to her father and her husband's will, and you'll worry yourself with her no more.

YUI
All right. But you know me - I always have to worry about someone -- who will I have to worry about now?

He rises. Pausing by one of the bolts of silken cloth, he draws out a bit and holds it to Yui's cheek. It's a quiet, erotically charged gesture.

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LI MU BAI
You must worry and pray for me. Sometimes this world tempts me to stray from the path I pledged myself to so long ago. How can I reach the next world if I am tempted by so much in this one?

He lets the cloth drop, and turns to go.

INT. TEA HOUSE - DAY

Yui and Haan sit amid the din of the teahouse.

HAAN
None of my contacts on the street have seen Fox. But - two of her old gang, Hsiang and Chan, have both slipped back into the city in the last couple of days and hooked up with Lhizong and his gang. The word is she is planning some kind of revenge on Chief Wong's household, maybe even on the day of the Wong girl's wedding to Gou.

YUI
That's tomorrow. I want you there with me, and ready for Jade Fox.

EXT. GOU COMPOUND GATE -- DAY

An excited crowd gathers for the big day -- May's wedding to Gou.

Through the throng Sir Te, accompanied by Li Mu Bai and Yui, makes his way and enters through the gates.

A well-dressed man slips in behind them -- Lo, in disguise. He catches Yui's eye.

Haan is shoved hither and thither in the crowd, and practically falls into Lo's arms.

HAAN
Hey, if it isn't the horse trader! And wow, you've really changed styles, you must have done some good business!

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LO
(flustered)
I don't know who you are, but stop bothering me.

Lo rushes into the crowd.

HAAN
But! Don't you...?

Haan shrugs.

EXT. GOU COURTYARD -- DAY

The big moment -- May's carriage arrives. Servants let up cries of "Welcome," and musicians play noisily.

From the cacophony, we make out Lo's voice, showering insults at May and her family.

LO
How can you do this, May?! You traitor! I'd rather die here now than let you go through with this! Why not tell the world what you really feel!

Guards start to move in on Lo as the crowd begins to murmur. Lo takes out his small bow and fires and arrow into the carriage. Pandemonium breaks loose as Lo is charged from all sides. He runs around, using anything -- even the heads of other people -- to evade his pursuers, among them Haan.

Just when it looks as if he'll be caught, he gets a helping hand that pulls him through a hidden doorway in the courtyard wall.

VOICE
C'mon, this way!

Lo follows, and the two of them run into a crowded side street.

Close on: Li Mu Bai, who has seen the departure.

INT. MAY'S CARRIAGE -- DAY

The arrow has lodged just a few inches from May's face into the side of the carriage. She pulls it out and tearfully examines it.

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EXT. SIDE STREET -- DAY

Lo finally catches up, breathless, to his helper, who removes a scarf from her face -- it is Yui.

LO
Thanks for the help -- but who are you?

Before he can react, Yui has a knife at his throat.

YUI
Shouldn't I be the one asking the questions?

LO
Didn't I just yell out enough of the answers?

YUI
You've got a point. (relaxing a bit) I suppose if you were working for Jade Fox you wouldn't have been so reckless.

LO
I'm not working for anybody. I was simply - to tell you the truth, I don't know what I'm doing.

May twirls the knife expertly, then re-sheathes it.

YUI
I knew there was a true love somewhere in May's former life. But I must say I'm a bit shocked at May's taste --

LO
Look, if you want --

YUI
I'm sorry. I can see that the both of you are suffering, but why add a scandal to her wedding, as well as your certain arrest and assassination?

LO
I just had to see her again -- I couldn't help myself. I didn't think --

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YUI
No you didn't.

LO
So now what?

YUI
For May's sake, stay away. It's that simple.

LO
I guess it is. And I suppose she's hired you to keep me away from her.

YUI
No.

LO
Then you're in the service of her father?

YUI
Not at all.

LO
So why are you meddling in her affairs?

YUI
Maybe I don't even know the answer to that. But I do know that there are limits to everything in life, and that May will have to learn that too.

LO
Then I doubt you know her at all - there are no limits that can be put on May. Mark my words.

He turns to go, then pauses.

LO
Who can I say has saved me today?

YUI
My name is Yui Hsui Lien.

LO
I have heard of you and your fighting skills. My name is Lo.

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YUI
What will you do now? Return to the Western Territories?

LO
There's no life for me there anymore. My life in this world is over; I will retire and seek some kind of peace, if it's possible for me.

YUI
(thinking)
Look, I know the monk at the Temple of Two Gorges, south of here. He has often taken in men of just your character, fighters and samurai who wish only to do battle with themselves. His name is Hsu. Go there, and with my name he will admit you.

LO
Thank you. And...if you see her...tell her I'm sorry. No, tell her nothing at all. My actions today have ended everything. Let her think of me as nothing better than dead.

YUI
Go -- before you're found and killed.

EXT. GOU COMPOUND - NIGHT

Yui approaches the waiting Li Mu Bai.

LI MU BAI
She's in there - safe and sound and married. You get the assassin?

YUI
Assassin? Oh, no. He got away.

LI MU BAI
(knowing she's lying)
Oh. Of course. (beat) You going to tell me what really happened?

YUI
Do I have to?

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LI MU BAI
No, I guess it doesn't matter now. Here, I'l walk you back to Sir Te's.

INT. GOU HALL - NIGHT

The Gou family, and assembled guests, are seated at the wedding ceremony. The bridal veil covers May's face.

INT. GOU HALL - NIGHT (LATER)

Only young Gou's friends are left, drunkenly raising toasts to him.

FRIEND
Enough! It's time we help him find the bridal chamber!

INT. GOU HALLWAY - NIGHT (CONT'D)

They rise and push Gou out into the hallway, loudly following him as he tipsily makes his way.

They reach the bedroom door. Gou throws open the door, to discover:

INT. WEDDING CHAMBER -- NIGHT (CONT'D)

-- An open window and May's wedding gown and veil crumpled on the ground, the arrow on top of it.

INT. TSAI'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Outside the house, voices and footsteps can be heard. Lanterns are lit.

Sue shakes the sleeping Haan awake.

SUE
Husband, get up quickly -- someone's knocking!

Haan staggers up and opens the door.

From Sue's p.o.v., we hear muffled oaths and curses. Then Haan slams the door shut, throws off his sword, and tosses himself down into bed again.

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SUE
Darling, what was it?

HAAN
That idiotic sword has been stolen again, and that Wong girl's been kidnapped from her bridal chamber. (rolling over) Good night!

EXT. STREET BESIDE WONG COMPOUND - NIGHT

A lone figure on horseback pauses by the wall, as if listening for something. We see the outlines of the sword under the figure's cape.

INT. WONG ROOM - NIGHT (CONT'D)

Chief Wong, distraught, looks out the window at the moon as his wife cries. He hears a horse neigh and hoofbeats pound on the stone outside his wall.

EXT. ROAD OUTSIDE BEIJING -- DAWN

The lone figure on horseback rides furiously along -- May, with the jade sword at her side.

EXT. BEIJING STREET - DAY

Yui rushes through the traffic, in a hurry.

INT. TSAI'S HOUSE - DAY

Yui bursts into the small house, where Sue is gathering some things for Haan.

YUI
What do your men tell you?

HAAN
She left by the West Gate, but then headed south. You think she's chasing after this Lo guy? Or maybe she'll hook up with Jade Fox?

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YUI
I don't know. Meet me in an hour at Te's, though. And send out every spy you've got -- We'll catch up to her soon enough.

INT. TE'S HALL -- DAY

A group has gathered around Sir Te and Li Mu Bai.

TE
We must assume that whoever stole the sword was also responsible for the girl's abduction - for together these two thefts strike a blow at all three allied clans - Gou, Wong and Te. It is of the utmost urgency we solve this case.

LI MU BAI
I will retrieve the sword, and return the girl to the Gous, to whom she rightfully belongs.

TE
You have any idea where the sword and the girl might be?

LI MU BAI
Not yet.

At this moment, Yui enters. Li Mu Bai looks briefly at her, then back to Te.

LI MU BAI
I will be off -- I have not time to lose.

He rises and walks out, right past Yui.

EXT. TE COMPOUND - DAY (CONT'D)

Yui catches up to Li Mu Bai.

YUI
Li Mu Bai! Wait!

He stops, and turns back to her.

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LI MU BAI
That girl should have been brought to justice a long time ago, but -- No, you don't need to hear any lectures from me, do you? Just let me finish this job alone, all right? It will make everything less - confusing. (beat) Good-bye.

He turns and leaves her standing there. After a moment, she charges after him.

YUI
Li Mu Bai! You can't just push me out of this -

He keeps walking.

YUI
All right, act that way. But if you want to know where she's gone I think you'd best follow me.

She turns and walks in the opposite direction. He pauses, still with his back to her, then turns around and starts walking behind her.

LI MU BAI
Shit!

EXT. TE COMPOUND - DAY

Li Mu Bai, Haan and Yui head out. A number of servants bid them farewell.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Li Mu Bai and Yui ride with resolution. Haan trails behind.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Li Mu Bai, Haan and Yui have stopped for food. Haan questions some of the villagers in the background, who point down the road, as Li Mu Bai and Yui silently drink. Haan walks back to them, nods, and they start out again.

EXT. BY A POND IN THE COUNTRYSIDE -- DAY

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Using her reflection in the pond, May forms her hair into a masculine ponytail. A smile forms on her face. She has changed into men's attire.

Happily, she does a flip and practices a couple of martial arts moves.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

May happily rides along.

EXT. ROAD -- DAY

Yui and Li Mu Bai ride side by side through the countryside, Haan still trailing a bit.

YUI
Beautiful, no? Even as committed a Taoist as you must admit that this world is full of wonderful things. It can't all be just an illusion.

LI MU BAI
I don't disagree. This world does partake of reality. But think of it as Yang Chu did: If the world as we experience it is so excellent, one would hope to live in our material bodies for as long as possible. So suppose you were to live as long as possible, maybe a hundred years. Half of that time is occupied with childhood and senility. Almost half of the rest is wasted in sleep at night and naps in the day time. Now take the remaining half -- almost half of that is lost in illness, sorrow, and grief. In what time remains there is perhaps one hour in which man can be content and free from worry. So you tell me, is it really worth the effort to chase a few more minutes of this fleeting happiness, when by keeping on the right path we can prepare our souls for immortality?

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YUI
You make it sound obvious.

LI MU BAI
Because it is. We must try to let go of this world. For when we die, if we still cling to the things and people in the world, our souls will never be totally liberated. We'll be condemned to a half existence, as ghosts, torn between eternity and the earth.

YUI
I think your philosophy is inhuman. What you're saying is that we can never love, can never love another person.

LI MU BAI
Such a love would imprison us.

YUI
(pause)
But what if I can't help it? What if I think I know that I - I mean, hypothetically, if one knew that one loved someone, what could be done?

LI MU BAI
(lovingly, stopping his horse)
Would this person - no, let me speak honestly - (looking deeply into her eyes) do you think you, Yui Hsui Lien, and I, Li Mu Bai, should destroy everything we've trained for, our life's work, our traditions, our faith, because when we look upon or think about the other we grow weak and amazed with desire?

YUI
There was a time many years ago when even you might have said yes. If I'd pushed you then! You were just headstrong enough, I think, to have done it.

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LI MU BAI
And don't you see - your modesty saved us, Yui Hsui Lien. Listen to me: We cannot calm the passions of our youth by igniting them again. It would be like trying to silence an echo by shouting at it. So let us stop this talk. Here, let's ride on a while in silence, just like an old married couple.

EXT. COUNTRY INN - NIGHT

May rides up. Loud voices and singing can be heard from inside the inn.

INT. COUNTRY INN - NIGHT

It's crowded, noisy, and rough. May enters, and is jostled by a drunk man who clutches a rather well-worn woman by his side.

MAY
Watch it, pal.

MAN
Hey, don't touch my woman.

MAY
Me? Touch her? I don't want that many diseases!

There are a few chuckles. The drunk man, now seemingly quite sober, stares at May.

MAN
I did this little sissy say about my wife?

The place goes quiet.

MAY
So you think I'm a sissy?

MAN
And rude, too!

May swiftly kicks him across the room, and is jumped from all sides by the other men in the tavern, whom she dispatches in seconds.

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The room is filled with moaning, injured men.

OLD INNKEEPER
Get out. We've no use for people like you here.

May, confused by her own brutality, rushes out.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

May rides furiously through the night.

EXT. ROADSIDE -- NIGHT

Yui and Li Mu Bai sit near each other as Haan tends the fire's dying embers.

YUI
Tell me your thoughts.

LI MU BAI
She is certainly putting that sword to use.

YUI
At least, by every report we've heard, we know she's alone.

LI MU BAI
If she is the "he" everyone is talking about.

YUI
Of course it's her.

LI MU BAI
But why would she pick fights at every opportunity? She must know that with each exploit she's that much easier to track. You would think she'd try to lay low.

YUI
But that's just it - she's not thinking. You can well imagine, she thought she'd find some wonderful world of freedom out on the road, but all she's found is...strangers.

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LI MU BAI
And she's not much of a bandit. What good is it to get into fights with half the people you encounter if you're not going to steal from them.

YUI
I told you she was no criminal. Do you see now what I meant when I said she was seeking her own path?

LI MU BAI
I don't think beating up peasants and riding your horse to death is much of an exemplary path, do you?

He yawns, lies back, and rolls over to go to sleep.

EXT. RIVER CROSSING - DAY

May rides up to the boat dock, where a few peasants, horses and carts come off of a large, rough-hewn raft. She addresses the ferryman.

MAY
How much to cross?

FERRYMAN
One tael.

She opens her purse.

MAY
I've but half a tael left.

FERRYMAN
Low on funds, eh?

MAY
I didn't realize I'd be taking such a long trip.

FERRYMAN
Well, no money, no ride.

MAY
Maybe you could sell me some of that soup you're cooking over there.

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FERRYMAN
I'll tell you what. I won't take you across, but I'll share my soup with any hungry traveller, for free.

EXT. RIVER CROSSING - DAY (LATER)

May eats with the ferryman.

MAY
You are very well-spoken. More like a scholar than a ferryman.

FERRYMAN
I am a scholar. I am a lot of things. I've been a monk, then a soldier, I've sailed all through the South Seas.

MAY
How did you end up here?

FERRYMAN
One day, on my travels, I was crossing this river. And as always I was impatient to keep moving. Well, the ferryman, seeing as I was the only customer, decided it was time for his afternoon nap and lay down and refused to budge. I cursed, and ranted and threatened him. I even drew my knife, I was so angry. But still he wouldn't budge! My voice began to crack from so much screaming! My hands were trembling! But still, he was a stone. Finally I grabbed him by the hair, and shook him!

MAY
So what did he do?

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FERRYMAN
Nothing. He was dead. It turns out he'd died in his sleep, and I'd been yelling at him for two hours! My God how I laughed and laughed at that, and then I thought, I have done nothing but travel and travel for forty years, why should I not stop here. So I took over the ferry that very day, and have been happy ever since, travelling back and forth across that river, and never going anywhere.

MAY
And won't you please take me across? Give me a job - I'll perform some service for you, in kind.

FERRYMAN
Ha! I already said no. Trust me, there's nothing for a poor scholar like you across that river.

MAY
How do you know - you've never gone any farther than the river's edge.

FERRYMAN
Ha ha! How clever you are! That's true. (turning serious) But no - no money, no ride. It's my personal golden rule.

May hesitantly reaches for her sword.

FERRYMAN
If you pull out that sword, you'd best be prepared to kill me with it.

May's hand pauses, then pulls out a tissue from her sleeve. She blows her nose. The old man laughs knowingly.

MAY
Good-bye old man.

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FERRYMAN
I'd tell you to stay out of trouble, but I can tell you're already in trouble!

EXT. VILLAGE MARKET -- DAY

May rides up and ties her horse to a post. She walks among the people of the village - a stream of human life - families, old people, children, friends - in which she knows she can take no part.

She walks down a small lane, and sits with her back against the wall of a storehouse.

Pensively, she takes a small object out of her pocket and draws it through the dusty ground - it's the jade comb.

EXT. VILLAGE MARKET -- DAY

Li Mu Bai and Yui walk through the market. Li Mu Bai pauses, standing next to May's horse. He notes a distinctive cloth tied on her saddle.

LI MU BAI
She's near. Check the market - I'll look over here.

EXT. VILLAGE STREET - DAY

Li Mu Bai cautiously makes his way, on the lookout for May.

INT. VILLAGE STOREHOUSE - DAY

Li Mu Bai enters, surprising May, who rises as he enters.

LI MU BAI
I believe you have something of mine. Please be so kind as to give it back.

MAY
I'm afraid that won't be possible.

LI MU BAI
Then I am afraid I will be forced to take it from you.

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[During the ensuing fight, Li Mu Bai, completely in control, "tests" May's responses to his moves. After each move, he analyzes her responses, and figures out how and what she has learned from Jade Fox. But with each test, May also learns more and more of Li Mu Bai's technique, and though on the defensive, is still defiant. Just as May is finally cornered, Yui arrives. May makes one last attempt to flee, but Li Mu Bai disables her shoulder, and she crumples in pain. Yui runs up to her.

Li Mu Bai picks up the sword.

LI MU BAI
(to Yui)
Tie her up. We're taking her back to Beijing.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Li Mu Bai rides ahead, as, in a horse-drawn cart led by Haan, May is transported. She writhes in pain in the back of the cart as Yui rides behind, a look of concern on her face. Yui dismounts, ties her horse to the cart, and hops in. She begins to attend to May's hurt shoulder.

YUI
Does this hurt?

MAY
A bit - yes.

YUI
Let me see.

Yui massages the wounded shoulder expertly.

YUI
It's an old device of Li Mu Bai's. (pulling on the arm) Here.

May winces, then relaxes.

MAY
That's better. Thanks. (beat) I've caused so much trouble. You believe me, don't you, when I tell you that I couldn't think of any other choice.

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YUI
I believe you. And whatever trouble you've caused, I'm sure the Gou family will find a way to hush it all up.

MAY
You're really taking me back there?

YUI
We must. It's our job. And it's time for you to face reality.

MAY
I guess I have no choice. Where else could I go anyhow?

YUI
Where were you going when we caught up to you?

MAY
(beat)
Nowhere.

YUI
I thought you might have been seeking...your friend.

MAY
Who? I have no friends. If you're thinking of Jade Fox, you're -

YUI
No. I was thinking of the one who gave you an arrow for a wedding gift - Lo.

MAY
(shocked)
How do you know his name? Was he captured? Did they torture him?

YUI
No, May, I think he's quite all right. (thinking) Let me ask you something, and answer me honestly. Do you love this Lo? Do you think you could live your life with him?

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MAY
I will answer you. But you of all people must know how different your two questions are. Yes, I love him. More than anything. But how can I even think that our lives could be lived together? I'm like you, Yui Hsui Lien, destined to float through life without connection.

YUI
Don't say it. Try to find peace in your life. Accept your fate as Gou's wife.

MAY
You know I never will.

Yui pauses. Then leans closer.

YUI
Then know this: If Lo has followed my advice, he has gone...

Wide shot: Haan, sleepily leads the cart, well out of ear shot of the conversation.

EXT. COUNTRY INN - DAY

They ride up to an inn.

LI MU BAI
We'll eat here.

YUI
(to Haan)
Keep an eye on her. I'll bring some food out to you.

INT. COUNTRY INN - DAY

Li Mu Bai and Yui eat in silence, served by an old woman. There are no other customers. Yui gathers some food and gets up.

EXT. COUNTRY INN - DAY

Yui deposits the food next to a sleeping Haan. She looks over at the cart, but her view of the back is obscured. She walks back into the inn.

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INT. COUNTRY INN - DAY

Yui stands by the fire, as Li Mu Bai takes a flute from his bag.

He plays a few mournful notes. Yui smiles over to him. He looks at her, a touch of sadness on his face.

Haan comes running in, yelling.

HAAN
She's gone! She untied the ropes! She's gone!

Li Mu Bai remains seated. He briefly plays a couple more notes, then lowers the flute.

HAAN
Well, shall we chase her?

LI MU BAI
Finish your lunch. There's no hurry.

YUI
You - you don't seem upset.

LI MU BAI
Of course I'm upset, but I knew you'd let her go.

YUI
You wanted me to free her? Li Mu Bai, I knew you had a heart --

LI MU BAI
-- Don't be a fool. It's simply that she is our bait for Jade Fox. I need now only keep a safe distance behind her, and Jade Fox will emerge, and enter my trap.

He begins to walk away, then stops a moment, and turns back to her, hesitating.

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LI MU BAI
And one more thing -- I think it's time we parted. It's not just that I can't trust you, it's that you can't trust yourself. I'm sorry.

YUI
I'm sorry, too, Li Mu Bai. You're right.

LI MU BAI
I wish I weren't.

He walks away. She watches him go.

Hann comes up to her.

HAAN
He's going? What about us?

YUI
He wants us to let him finish the job alone.

HAAN
So what now? We go back to Beijing?

YUI
Of course not! We follow him - from a distance.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD -- DAY

May, dirty and disheveled, hails a passing carriage.

INT. COUNTRY CARRIAGE -- DAY

[To be scripted. The other passengers and couriers become suspicious of May - she claims she'll have the money to pay at the next stop.]

EXT. VILLAGE -- DAY

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The carriage pulls up and the couriers bustle out in front of May. As she steps down they turn and pounce on her, covering her with a sheet.

COURIER #1
The reward is ours!

COURIER #2
Let's haul her to the bailiff's -- he'll know what to do with her!

They prop May onto her feet, and push her along as a small crowd follows.

EXT. BAILIFF'S -- DAY

Just before May is put in jail, a masked figure arrives and, in a burst of brutal violence, slaughters the jailers and liberates May, who barely has enough strength left to notice that her savior is none other than -- Jade Fox.

INT. BARN -- DAY

Kept in a remote barn by Jade Fox, May is slowly nursed back to health. Jade Fox tells her that she has heard all about her new reputation, and that the two of them will make a great team together. May barely responds.

INT. BARN -- DAY

At the farm, Jade Fox tells May that she must go out for supplies; she warns her to stay put, and not to raise an alarm.

EXT. ROAD -- DAY

Yui and Haan on the road. They are following Li Mu Bai's trail.

INT. BARN -- DAY

At the farm, May bathes herself. As she is dressing, she senses that someone is there. She pulls back a curtain, to reveal Li Mu Bai, holding the jade sword. "If you would be so kind as to tell me the whereabouts of the woman from whom I first took this." With lightning reflexes she leaps over him, attempting an escape. Li Mu Bai blocks her. But she is able to make it to the door. She says a quick farewell, opens the

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door, only to reveal -- Jade Fox, who, with a laugh, throws a dagger that lands squarely in Li Mu Bai's chest. With the last of his strength, Li Mu Bai hurls the sword, which decapitates Jade Fox.

May runs to the dying Li Mu Bai, and helps him sit up.

MAY
Li Mu Bai!

She tries to take the dagger out from his chest.

LI MU BAI
No - don't bother. It's too late for me.

MAY
My God, no!

She releases her hand from the dagger, only to look up and see Yui standing in the doorway. May backs away from Li Mu Bai as Yui solemnly walks to him.

She holds him in her arms.

LI MU BAI
Yui, Yui Hsui Lien.

YUI
Yes, my love.

LI MU BAI
My hand, I offer it to you, in marriage.

YUI
But what about the freedom you have always sought in death? Why chain yourself to me now?

LI MU BAI
I would rather be a ghost chained to this world than an immortal spirit, to be with you somehow.

YUI
Then I will be your bride, Li Mu Bai. I am your bride.

LI MU BAI
My wife, I will love you always.

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She kisses him gently, as he closes his eyes, and quietly breathes his last breath.

May slowly lays his head down, rises gently, and picks up the bloody sword.

MAY
You must believe, it was Jade Fox...

Raising the sword in front of her, Yui lets out a terrible yell and charges May.

Yui is in a muderous rage: May, defending herself, fights furiously back.

Finally, May gets the upper hand, but at the decisive moment stops herself, and falls to her knees.

MAY
Please, take my life. I have dishonored my calling and myself. My selfishness caused Li Mu Bai's death!

Yui pauses, the sword raised above May's head.

YUI
Get up.

May rises.

YUI
I will return this sword to Beijing once again, and bury Li Mu Bai.

Both women are crying.

MAY
And what will you do with me?

YUI
You must do as I say. Haan will escort you to the Temple of the Two Gorges. I hope that Lo awaits you there. From then on, your path is your own. Just promise me this - don't make the same mistake I have made. Follow your heart as well as your calling.

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EXT. TEMPLE -- DAY

As Haan and May reach the temple gate, they see Lo standing above at the doorway.

HAAN
(yelling up)
Aha! It's you, the horse trader! It seems after all I did get the chance to return your kindness!

May turns to Haan and, bidding him a good life, tells him to cherish the woman he loves and to make a home for her. She asks him one last favor -- to stand guard just for this one night outside the gates of the abandoned temple. He agrees, and watches her enter the compound alone.

INT. TEMPLE -- DAY

In the Temple, May and Lo tenderly and silently greet each other. She presses her palm against his cheek, wet with tears. They make love.

INT. TEMPLE -- DAY

The next morning, Lo wakes up alone to find the Jade comb on the pillow beside him.

EXT. CLIFF -- MORNING

In the early morning fog, Haan follows May at a distance as she reaches the top of the cliff. She raises her arms out, and lets the wind lift her sleeves. Smiling, she gives one last look back to Haan, and then vaults off the cliff into the clouds. Haan runs up to the ledge, and is quickly joined by Lo, who looks down as the clouds part to reveal the rocks below -- but May is nowhere to be seen. Haan is thunderstruck, and runs along the cliffs searching for her, calling out her name, but Lo just smiles bittersweetly, and walks back down the hill, pressing the Jade Comb in his palm.

End.

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